



# CCM Testimony

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## EDUCATION COMMITTEE

March 15, 2023

**John Elsesser, Coventry Town Manager, member of CCM Board of Directors.**

CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent 168 towns and cities.

**CCM and the Town of Coventry are testifying on two bills:**

- **SB 1198 – Air Quality in Schools**
- **HB 6884 – Teacher Recruitment and Retention.**

**SB 1198 - Air Quality in Schools:** I was fortunate to participate in the school indoor air quality working group over the past several months. This task force, which was comprised of school and local officials, public health experts and industry professionals, spent considerable time weighing all factors and considerations to address air quality in our schools. Some of those conversations and work should continue, which is why an important component of SB 1198 is to extend and expand the charge of the school indoor air quality working group and develop a portal for collecting and making available reports of inspections and evaluations of school indoor air quality and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. Information will be vital to ensure proper metrics and standards can be developed.

In addition, CCM continues to advocate for a funding increase in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system grant program. Specifically, CCM would urge the legislature to reconsider its prohibition on using local ARPA funds as matching funds for the grant, and ensure a proper time period to ensure these grants can be properly executed. Furthermore, as the grant program is largely reliant on federal funding and therefore may not be financially sustainable, we are urging the legislature to amend the School Construction Grant Program to allow HVAC upgrades to be eligible for the program in subsequent years.

Town and city officials remain vigilant on all public health-related issues during the COVID-19 pandemic and the quality of indoor air in public schools is critical to the health and safety of our students, faculty and staff. We remain supportive of this concept and are ready and willing to be a partner, alongside other stakeholders and the state, in developing practical and attainable solutions.

**HB 6884 - Teacher Recruitment and Retention:** CCM understands the complexities of recruiting and retaining teachers in Connecticut. We recognize that the problems are complex in nature and varied in scope. To that end we understand and appreciate the need for a

comprehensive solution and a holistic approach. Included in the bill are several reasonable proposals, however CCM does have questions/concerns with some, in particular:

Section 13: Which would require 30 minutes of uninterrupted duty-free period for lesson preparation. The language is somewhat ambiguous as to whether this is a daily, weekly or over the course of semester. While time for lesson preparation is necessary, this is often a matter of collective bargaining. If this duty-free period is daily, that will require additional staff needed to ensure adequate supervision and teaching for our students.

Section 19: Which would create a task force to review the financing of the teachers' retirement system (TRS). While CCM is generally not opposed to any task force, there is a concern that this may be the proverbial "camel's nose under the tent" as to requiring towns and cities to absorb a portion of the normal costs associated with TRS.

In recent years, there have been proposals to require municipalities to absorb the cost of TRS. Those proposals would have represented one of the largest property tax increases in modern history, as it would shift a combined \$73 million dollars directly on to Connecticut property tax payers.

We ask that in reviewing this proposal the Committee thoroughly consider whether it is in the best interest of the State to enact such a large local property tax increase and extensively examine the impact that it will have on local economies and communities.

If a task force is created to examine municipalities contributing to TRS, CCM believes that it should include conversations to allow general municipal government with direct access and the ability to participate in collective bargaining pertaining to teacher compensation. Currently, municipalities are not represented or under-represented in the process and we believe that direct involvement is critical to ensure adequate containment of cost in the out years.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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If you have any questions, please contact Mike Muszynski, Chief Strategy Officer of CCM at [mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org](mailto:mmuszynski@ccm-ct.org) or 203-500-7556.